

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Federal Agency Name(s):** Office of Ocean Exploration, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce
- **Funding Opportunity Title:** NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration (OE) Announcement of Opportunity, Fiscal Year 2005
- **Announcement Type:** Initial Announcement
- **Funding Opportunity Number:** __
- **Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number(s):** 11.460 - Special Oceanic and Atmospheric Projects
- **Dates:** Applications for FY05 collaboration with OE will be accepted within four separate categories: Deep Corals, Arctic, Archaeology, and General Exploration. Pre-proposals are required only for the General Exploration category. Pre-proposals must be received by August 30, 2004. Full proposals are required for all categories. Full proposals must be received by October 12, 2004. To insure that your application will be considered in FY05, it must be received by the dates listed above. However, depending on the availability of funds, the Office of Ocean Exploration may consider applications received after those dates. No email and/or facsimile pre-proposals and/or proposals submissions will be accepted. Applicants desiring acknowledgment of OE's receipt of their applications should include a self-addressed post card.
- **Application Submission:** ATTN: PROPOSAL MANAGER, NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration, 1315 East-West Highway, SSMC3, 10th Floor, Silver Spring, MD 20910, 301-713-9444.
- **Funding Opportunity Description:** OE is seeking pre-proposals and full proposals to support its mission, consistent with NOAA's Strategic Plan (<http://www.spo.noaa.gov/strplan.htm>), to search, investigate, and document unknown and poorly known areas of the ocean and Great Lakes through interdisciplinary exploration, and to advance and disseminate knowledge of the ocean environment and its physical, chemical, biological, and historical resources. Successful OE proposals will be relatively high-risk, innovative and broad-based in terms of their approach and objectives. OE is soliciting proposals whose objectives fall within one of four different categories: Deep Corals, the Arctic, Archaeology, and General Exploration. NOAA anticipates a reduced appropriation to the OE program this year. Total funds available through this announcement, including shiptime costs, are estimated at approximately \$5,000,000. The majority of funds are anticipated to be targeted for the Deep Corals and Arctic categories.

Submissions that do not directly fall within the Deep Corals, Arctic, and Archaeology categories described in the full announcement should be submitted within the General Exploration category. Submissions focusing solely on technology development and education submissions will not be accepted. Total funding available for General Exploration submissions is estimated at \$900,000. Total funding available for Archaeology is estimated at \$200,000. Applicants are encouraged to visit the Ocean Explorer Website: <http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov> to familiarize themselves with past and present OE-funded activities. The application kit will be accessible at <http://www.explore.noaa.gov/opportunity/welcome.html>.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program & Notice Objective

The OE Program engages in path finding ocean exploration in support of NOAA's Strategic Plan. OE's objectives are to explore the ocean and map its resources, to gain new insights about its physical, chemical, biological, and archaeological characteristics, and its living and non-living resources. The purpose of this announcement is to invite the submission of pre-proposals and full proposals that address the following thematic priorities.

B. Program Priorities & Guidance

In FY05, OE is seeking proposals for collaboration that address these thematic priorities for exploration:

- Ocean mapping and bathymetry;
- Marine life inventories;
- Marine archaeology;
- Habitat and ecosystem characterization (including corals, essential fish habitat, seeps, and vent communities); and
- New ocean resources

These thematic priorities are consistent with NOAA's Strategic Plan and were established in part from eight regional NOAA-hosted ocean exploration workshops that convened ocean scientists, explorers, and educators from public, private and commercial organizations and invited their comments on the future direction of exploration. Reports from the 2002 workshops can be viewed online at <http://explore.noaa.gov/workshops/welcome.html>.

Submissions to OE must be applicable to one of the following four categories: Deep Corals, Arctic, Archaeology, and General Exploration.

1. **Deep Corals**: NOAA will conduct an expedition to explore and characterize deep-sea coral habitats along the path of the Gulf Stream and associated currents,

targeting reef-building type corals such as *Oculina* and *Lophelia pertusa* and soft corals that are often found in association with seamounts.

The Deep Corals expedition will be conducted in discrete legs focusing on the following regions: the northern & eastern Gulf of Mexico; the Straits of Florida & South Atlantic Bight; and the Mid-Atlantic Bight & New England region. The approximately 70-day cruise will utilize a ROV aboard the NOAA Ship *Ronald H. Brown*. [Please do not include the cost of these assets in the proposal budget.] Proposals should focus on one of the regions described for the duration of approximately 10-20 days. Proposals that demonstrate a willingness to collaborate with other projects selected for this category, in terms of planning, product development, and data sharing, are strongly encouraged.

The Deep Corals Expedition will focus on the following at-sea exploration and research objectives:

- Survey areas to locate deep-sea corals using multibeam;
- Develop real-time maps and 3-D computer simulations;
- Conduct oceanographic observations;
- Collect sediment samples to a depth of 1-meter;
- Conduct visual surveys using ROVs;
- Collect discrete samples of specific deep-sea coral species, associated fish and invertebrates at targeted locations;
- OE also encourages consideration of in-situ instrumentation at select locations.

OE is currently working with other NOAA program offices, federal institutions, and public and private organizations to design this expedition, including developing a consistent approach to gather, organize, and process data and information. It is planned to be a component of a larger international effort. Once proposals have been selected, OE will work with the PIs through a series of work sessions and conference calls to plan an integrated expedition that addresses the goal of characterizing deep-sea coral habitats in terms of:

- biogeographical changes;
- recruitment patterns and transport of larvae;
- habitat function (associated species abundance, diversity, and interaction); and
- natural and anthropogenic impacts.

Due to the specific requirements for this announcement, only full proposals for the Deep Corals category are being solicited. No pre-proposals will be accepted or reviewed.

2. Arctic: OE anticipates having access to 25-30 days of icebreaker time and a 3000-ft depth capable ROV with scientific sampling capacity. The program office is accepting proposals to use these assets during an Arctic Expedition in the summer of 2005.

Please do not include the cost of these assets in the proposal budget.

OE is accepting interdisciplinary submissions for deep-sea exploratory science in the Arctic in areas surrounding North America. Potential geographic areas of interest may include, but are not limited to:

- Deep-sea basins and shelf breaks: OE has a considerable interest in continuing previous OE-sponsored work in the Canada Basin;
- Ridge systems: particularly the Gakkel Ridge.

Due to the relatively high cost of conducting polar science, applicants are encouraged to identify sources of cost-sharing. Prior to submitting proposals within the Arctic category, applicants are encouraged to contact OE regarding the availability of ship and ROV time. Only full proposals for the Arctic category are being solicited. No pre-proposals will be accepted or reviewed.

3. **Archaeology**: Proposals should address initial phases of exploration and discovery, including systematic methodology to locate, survey and evaluate sites for archaeological or historical significance. Total funding available for Archaeology submissions in FY05 is estimated at \$200,000.

In FY 2005, OE will only consider projects that demonstrate partnerships including an appropriate state management entity and an academic institution. Both organizations should be listed as part of the proposed project's co-principle investigators. This does not preclude federal, private, or non-profit agencies, institutions or companies from submitting proposals. Through this announcement, OE endeavors to support the needs of coastal resource management in US inshore or Great Lakes waters. Proposed projects outside the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone will not be considered this year. Appropriate maritime heritage sites may include, but are not limited to:

- Sunken or abandoned watercraft;
- Submerged aircraft;
- Submerged tribal and Native American assemblages;
- Inundated, prehistoric landscapes.

Only full proposals for the Archaeology category are being solicited. No pre-proposals will be accepted or reviewed.

4. **General Exploration**: In addition to the previous categories, submissions that address the Program & Notice Objective (see Section I.A.) as well as the OE program thematic priorities (see Section I.B.) may be submitted under the General Exploration category. Submission of a pre-proposal is a prerequisite for submission of a full proposal in this category.

Total funding available for General Exploration submissions is estimated at \$900,000. An estimated \$450,000 of this amount may be allocated to lease approximately 20 days of ship and submersible time from the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution (HBOI) on the R/V Seward Johnson I or II. If your application is crafted to use these resources, please do not include the cost of these assets in your budget request.

Though General Exploration submissions are not limited to the following topics, applicants may consider:

- An add-on exploratory complement to an existing focused research cruise or other ship of opportunity
- A project targeting use of the approximately 20 days of HBOI ship and manned submersible assets.

Archaeology, education and/or technology development proposals will not be accepted within the General Exploration category. See section I.D. Additional Funding Opportunity for alternative technology development funding opportunities.

C. Program Authority: 33 U.S.C. 883d

D. Additional Funding Opportunity

NOAA anticipates contributing OE funds to a forthcoming announcement through the National Ocean Partnership Program (NOPP), under subjects relating to ocean exploration, such as technology development and Census of Marine Life. Interested parties should look for the forthcoming announcement at this URL: <http://www.nopp.org/>.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

NOAA anticipates a reduced appropriation for the OE program in FY05, and consequently anticipates approximately \$5,000,000, including shiptime costs, to be available to fund proposals accepted through this solicitation. Not all available FY 2005 OE program funds will be awarded through this announcement. See section. I.D. Additional Funding Opportunities for other potential funding sources. A portion of remaining FY05 funds will also be allocated to proposals selected through the FY04 Announcement of Opportunity.

It is expected that approximately 25 awards will be made through this solicitation, pending the availability of funds. Please note that several proposals submitted in response to the FY04 solicitation will also be considered in this year's pool of proposals for FY05 funding. The OE Director may hold over select proposals submitted for FY05 funding into FY06 to consider awarding out of the FY06 appropriation. OE will determine during the FY06 selection process whether to provide funding or decline the held proposal(s).

Proposals funded through the FY04 Announcement of Opportunity, excluding shiptime or submersible costs, ranged from approximately \$17,000 to \$500,000 with an average of approximately \$85,000. Proposals may also be considered for funds greater than the range described here. The majority of FY05 funds available through this announcement will be targeted for the Deep Corals and Arctic categories. Total funding available for General Exploration submissions is estimated at \$900,000. Total funds available for the Archaeology category is estimated at \$200,000.

Funds have not yet been appropriated for this program. Publication of this announcement does not obligate NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate all or any part of the available funds. There is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to initiate research activities where funding has been recommended by OE. The exact amount of funds that may be awarded will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant and NOAA representatives. Future opportunities for submitting proposals to the competitive process for exploratory research are anticipated, but will be dependent on OE funding levels and on the performance of existing awardees.

B. Project/Award Period

Although one to three-year proposals may be accepted, the present principal focus of the OE program will be on one-year projects. Applications must include a scope of work and a budget for the entire award period. The earliest date for receipt of awards will be

approximately 120-150 days after the close of this solicitation; applicants should consider this selection and processing time in proposed research activities.

If an application is selected and approved for funding, NOAA has no obligation to provide additional funding in connection with this project in subsequent years. Multi-year requests may be funded in their entirety or on an annual basis. OE may 1) fund year one only and require applicants to submit a full proposal in later years; 2) fund year one and provide out-year funding contingent upon factors including successful accomplishment of prior-year objectives as well as availability of program funding and other relevant resources, but not requiring an applicant to resubmit a full proposal; or 3) fund all years in year one.

C. Type of funding instrument

Proposals selected for funding from non-Federal applicants will be funded through a project grant or cooperative agreement under the terms of this notice. Proposals selected for funding from NOAA scientists will be funded through an intra-agency transfer. Proposals selected for funding from non-NOAA Federal agency will be funded through an inter-agency transfer. For applications funded through cooperative agreements, substantial involvement of the federal government may include, but is not limited to, activities such as specifying direction or redirection of the scope of work due to inter-relationships with other projects or stipulating that the recipient must meet or adhere to specific procedural requirements before subsequent stages of a project may continue.

D. Permits and Approvals

It is the applicant's responsibility to obtain all necessary Federal, state and local government permits and approvals where necessary for the proposed work to be conducted. Applicants are expected to design their proposals so that they minimize the potential adverse impact on the environment. If applicable, documentation of requests for or approvals of environmental permits must be included in the proposal package. Applications will be reviewed to ensure that they have sufficient environmental documentation to allow program staff to determine the environmental impact of a proposal under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

III. Eligibility Information:

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are institutions of higher education, other nonprofits, commercial organizations, organizations under the jurisdiction of foreign governments, international organizations, state, local and Indian tribal governments. Applications from federal agencies will be considered. *Please Note:* Before non-NOAA federal applicants may be funded, they must demonstrate that they have legal authority to receive funds from another federal agency in excess of their appropriation. Because this announcement is not proposing to procure goods or services from applicants, the Economy Act (31 USC 1535) is not an appropriate legal basis.

B. Cost Sharing

Though cost-sharing is not required, it is encouraged (see Evaluation Criterion 3, “Project Costs”).

C. Funding Requirements

By receiving funding from OE, all applicants agree to the following outreach, education, and data management requirements.

1. Outreach & Education: All funded applicants and collaborators shall cooperate with OE in facilitating education and outreach activities. This may include, for example, participation in the development of lesson plans, professional development for teachers, accommodation of a teacher/educator-at-sea, participation in a media event or press conference to describe the expedition and its findings, at-sea media participation, and support for student tours of the research vessel and interaction with scientists in shipboard labs. Science-based exploration proposals need not craft a specific education and outreach component; the OE program will assess and provide an appropriate outreach activity in collaboration with the applicant.

2. Data Management: The 2000 President's Panel on Ocean Exploration called for a federal program that promotes data management and dissemination so that discoveries can result in a maximum and immediate benefit. To implement this recommendation NOAA requests that each applicant shall meet the following data management requirements:

a. Applicants will provide metadata, e.g., number and type of data, and description of the data collected, in a manner defined by NOAA, immediately upon completion of a project cruise. Other data or data products may also be required at the discretion of the OE Director.

b. Applicants will provide OE and the public access to acquired data sets and associated products as soon as practical and, in no case, later than one year following the date of collection, unless an extension is specifically granted by OE.

c. Proposals should include a description and justification of data funding needs and explain how data will be made accessible or available to the public.

d. NOAA's Ocean Explorer Website (<http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov>) is the principal vehicle for chronicling and documenting all missions supported by NOAA and OE. Applicants and mission participants will be required to provide material for this site such as cruise tracks; preliminary bathymetry; characterization of data collected; photographic or other images from the mission; and participants' interviews, essays, or written materials. Funded applicants will be required to cooperate with the NOAA Ocean Explorer website team which may include at-sea accommodation of a NOAA web team member. (See Ancillary Information at: <http://explore.noaa.gov> for more details about this requirement).

D. Potential Partners

OE anticipates and encourages investigators to seek complementary funding for their proposed projects through linked proposals to other agencies, both internal and external to NOAA. The National Science Foundation, the federal agencies of the National Ocean Partnership Program, and other NOAA programs have mission objectives which involve ocean research and technology development. Examples of other NOAA agencies and programs are: the National Undersea Research Program, the National Sea Grant College Program, the Arctic Research Office, NOAA Fisheries, and the National Ocean Service. OE will work with program managers at other agencies to facilitate such projects. OE places a high priority on proposed co-funded projects that receive high ratings through each agency's respective evaluation process. For additional details about these other programs, see: <http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/>.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. To Request Application Packages

The required OE forms and instructions for applicants as well as the standard NOAA grant application forms will be accessible through the OE Office web site at <http://www.explore.noaa.gov/opportunity/welcome.html>. Hardcopies can also be obtained via mail or phone request to NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration, 1315 East West Highway, SSMC 3, 10th Floor, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910, or requested by phone at (301) 713-9444. Supplemental information regarding the standard NOAA grants documentation can be obtained at <http://www.ofa.noaa.gov/%7Egrants/appkit.html>. Information about past and present OE-funded activities is available through the Ocean Explorer Website at <http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov>.

B. Content and Form of Application

Applications will be accepted within four separate categories: Deep Corals, Arctic, Archaeology, and General Exploration (For details regarding each of the submission categories, see section I.B Program Priorities and Guidance). Pre-proposals are required only for submissions in the General Exploration category. A pre-proposal is a prerequisite for submission of a full proposal in only the General Exploration category. Full proposals are required for all submission categories.

Preliminary Proposals: Only submissions in the General Exploration category (see section I.B. Program Priorities and Guidance, General Exploration) must submit a pre-proposal. Pre-proposals should summarize the proposed research, identify project priorities, provide a statement of objectives, describe how the proposed project relates to OE's mission, identify all major collaborators, and include a summary budget. Applicants should also identify 1) clearly defined area of proposed operations (e.g., including latitude, longitude, and depth), 2) required platforms or other critical assets. 3) any auxiliary funding sources for the proposed project, 4) time or operational constraints, especially with regard to field operations.

All pre-proposals must be typewritten on 8.5x11 inch paper in 12-point font. Pre-proposals may not exceed 2 pages. Pre-proposals must include a completed pre-proposal cover sheet (available electronically at

<http://www.explore.noaa.gov/opportunity/welcome.html>. The Principal Investigator's last name must be typed in the bottom right-hand corner of each page. Three hard copies of the complete pre-proposal must be received by [August 30, 2004. See Section IV.A. To Request Application Packages to request a hard copy of the application package. See Section IV.F. for hard copy submission information.

Proposals: Full proposals are required for all submissions. Full proposals in the General Exploration category will only be accepted if a pre-proposal was submitted and received within the designated time frame. There is no pre-proposal prerequisite for submissions in other categories. All proposals must include the following, packaged in the order listed here:

1. **Completed proposal cover sheet** (available electronically at <http://www.explore.noaa.gov/opportunity/welcome.html>);
2. **Maximum half-page executive summary:** Describe the essential elements of the project being proposed. Include: 1) Title, 2) List of names and affiliations of each investigator who will significantly contribute to the project, 3) Submission Category, 4) Funding request for each year of the project as well as total funding requested, and 5) Concise statement of the objectives of the project, the scientific methodology to be used, and the rationale for the work proposed;
3. **Maximum 15-page project description:** Describe the rationale, methodology, and justification for the proposed science (i.e. What is the problem or issue being addressed? What is its scientific, technical, or socioeconomic importance? What are the goals, objectives, and anticipated approach of the proposed project? What capabilities do the partners possess that will benefit the project?). Identify project priorities, provide a statement of objectives, and describe how the proposed project relates with OE's mission. Applicants should also identify 1) clearly defined area of proposed operations (e.g., including latitude, longitude, and depth), 2) required platforms or other critical assets, 3) any auxiliary funding sources for the proposed project, 4) responsibilities of each major participant, and 5) time or operational constraints, especially with regard to field operations.
4. **Summary of relevant current funding support:** Applicants must provide information on all their current and pending Federal support for ongoing projects and proposals, including potential subsequent funding in the case of continuing grants. The proposed project and all other projects or activities using Federal assistance or that requires a portion of time of the principal investigator or other senior personnel should be included. The relationship between the proposed project and these other projects should be described, and the number of person-months per year to be devoted to the projects must be stated.
5. **Brief resumes for each investigator:** two pages maximum for all Principal and Co-Principal Investigator(s) involved in carrying out the proposal, including recent relevant publication references;
6. **Detailed tabular budget:** Separate budgets within the single proposal must be provided if more than one funding action is anticipated (e.g., if funds are to be allocated to more than one institution or agency through subcontracts).

7. Budget narrative: (including justification for non-standard items); Detailed description of cost justification should be provided..

8. Forms, to be submitted in triplicate, each with original signatures and signed in blue pen, include:

a. SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance (Rev July 2003). Please note that both the Principal Investigator and an administrative contact should be identified in Section 5 of the SF424 or Section 10. Applicants should enter "11.460" for the CFDA Number and "NOAA Special Oceanic and Atmospheric Projects" for the title;

b. SF-424A Budget Information - Nonconstruction Programs (Rev July 1997) There should be an annual budget for each year of the project as well as a cumulative budget for the entire project. Subcontracts should include a separate budget justification page that itemizes all budget items in sufficient detail to enable reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of the funding requested. (Please see the NOAA budget guidelines at <http://www.ofa.noaa.gov/%7Egrants/appkit.html>);

c. SF-424B Assurances - Nonconstruction Programs;

d. SF-LLL Disclosure of Lobbying Activities;

e. CD-346 Application for Funding Assistance;

f. Form CD-511 Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension and Other Responsibility matters: Drug-Free Workplace Requirements and Lobbying,

g. Form CD-512 Certifications Regarding Debarment, Suspension, Ineligibility and Voluntary Exclusion-Lower Tier Covered Transactions and Lobbying;

h. If applicable, please also submit your most current negotiated indirect cost rate agreement.

The Proposal project description may not exceed 15 pages. The 15-page project description including all text and any tables and visual materials (such as charts, graphs, maps, photographs, and other pictorial presentations. The 15-page limit does not include the cover sheet, executive summary, budget and budget justification, literature citation, current and pending support, curriculum vitae, letters of commitment, and required forms. No appendices are permitted. The bottom right-hand corner of every page, excluding cover sheet, must be numbered and labeled with the Principal Investigator's last name. Tables and visual materials, including charts, graphs, maps, photographs, and other pictorial presentations are to be included in the 15-page limit.

Each application should be binder-clipped. Applications should not be bound or stapled and should be printed on one side only. Three hardcopies of the proposal (including three originals signed in blue ink) of each application are required. If applicants wish reviewers to receive included color graphics, glossy photographs, or other unusual materials, applicants are encouraged to submit a total of 10 complete hard copies of the proposal package. In addition, it is highly recommended that applicants submit a digital version (cdrom, floppy disk, or zip disk) of a complete proposal, preferably in Adobe .pdf format in order to facilitate proposal review.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Pre-proposals for the General Exploration category must be received by August 30, 2004. All proposals, hard copies and digital versions, must be received by October 12, 2004. See section IV.F. for hard copy submission information. Applications will be stamped

with the date on which they arrive at the Program Office. Proposals received after the deadline, or proposals that deviate from the format described in this Notice will not be accepted. No email and/or facsimile pre-proposals and/or proposals submissions will be accepted. Applicants desiring acknowledgment of OE's receipt of their applications should include a self-addressed post card.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications under this program are subject to Executive Order 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs." Applicants must contact their State's Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to find out about and comply with the State's process under EO 12372. The names and addresses of the SPOCs are listed in the Office of Management and Budget's website: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html>.

E. Funding Restrictions

No special restrictions apply.

F. Addresses for Application Submission

Pre-proposals and proposals must be submitted to: ATTN: Proposal Manager, NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration, 1315 East West Highway, SSMC III, 10th Floor, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

V. Application Review Information

A. Pre-Proposal Evaluation Criteria.

The OE Director will make the decision to encourage or discourage full proposal submissions in the General Exploration category based on one or more of the following factors: (1) Consistency with the format of this announcement (2) Applicability of the project objectives to OE mission and themes priorities (see Section I.A. Program & Notice Objectives and Section I.B. Program Priorities & Guidance) (3) Extent to which the pre-proposal focuses on a geographical area that is unknown or poorly known (4) Reasonableness of project costs relative to available program funds (5) Logistical feasibility (e.g., ship availability), given OE resource availability. The final decision to submit a full proposal is up to the applicant.

B. Proposal Evaluation Criteria.

Proposals will be evaluated and rated individually by (a) independent peer panel review or by (b) correspondence review. The evaluators will be composed of scientists, engineers, social scientists, economists, and resource managers as appropriate to the scope of proposals received in response to this announcement. The following criteria will be used to review proposals using the corresponding weight value:

1. Importance/Relevance and Applicability of Proposal to the Program Goals
(20%): This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work

and/or relevance to NOAA, international, federal, regional, state, or local activities. For the OE review process this includes the degree to which the proposal addresses and supports OE's mission and the objectives of this notice (see Section I.A. Program & Notice Objectives and Section I.B. Program Priorities & Guidance);

2. **Scientific and Technical merit** (40%): This criterion assesses whether there are clear project goals and objectives, the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, and whether the methods are appropriate. For the OE review process this includes: a) the scientific and/or technical value of the work proposed, its probability of success, and the applicant's scientific and/or technical capabilities to undertake the proposed work; b) the anticipated scientific and/or technical impact of the results of the project on the advancement of knowledge within the field(s) of the endeavor;

3. **Overall qualifications of applicants** (20%): This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. For the OE review process this includes the qualifications of the applicant to accomplish the work proposed.

4. **Project Costs** (20%): This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time-frame. For the OE review process this includes the reasonableness of project costs, including cost-share, relative to the scope of work proposed;

5. **Outreach and Education** (0%): This criterion assesses whether the project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAAs mission to project the Nations natural resources.

All proposals will be rated by the independent peer reviewers or correspondence review panel according to an adjectival scale (that will later be converted into a score) ranging in order of decreasing merit, as follows:

Excellent: Comprehensive, thorough and of exceptional merit, one or more major strengths, no major weaknesses, and any minor weaknesses easily correctable.

Very Good: Competent, one or more major strengths, strengths outweigh weaknesses, and major weaknesses correctable.

Good: Reasonable, may be strengths and/or weaknesses, weaknesses do not significantly detract from the proposal's viability, any major weaknesses are correctable.

Fair: One or more major weaknesses, weaknesses outweigh strengths, major weaknesses may possibly be corrected or minimized.

Poor: One or more major weaknesses, which will be difficult to correct or may not be correctable.

C. Review and Selection Process

Once a full proposal is received by NOAA, an initial administrative review is conducted to determine compliance with requirements and completeness of the application.

If proposals are determined to be in compliance and complete, independent peer reviewers shall rate the individual proposals using the evaluation criteria and percentage weights provided above. Reviewers will not rank proposals against each other. Both Federal and non-Federal experts in the field may be used in this process. The individual peer reviewer scores shall be averaged for each application and presented to the program officer.

For proposals considered by a peer review panel, no consensus advice will be solicited.

The OE Director will have the final authority and responsibility for decisions regarding proposal selection. High peer review ratings may not result in funding for a given proposal. Investigators may be asked to modify objectives, work plans or budgets levels, and provide supplemental information required by the agency prior to the award. Subsequent administrative processing will be in accordance with current NOAA financial administrative procedures. When a decision is made (whether an award or declination), summaries of reviews will be made available to the applicant upon request.

D. Selection Factors

The selection factors include the following:

7. Availability of funding.
8. Balance/distribution of funds:
 - A. Geographically: This includes logistical feasibility (e.g., ship availability) given OE resource availability.
 - B. By type of institutions: Ideal projects involve substantial collaborations with multiple institutions, government, academia, or industry
 - C. By type of partners:
 - D. By research areas
 - E. By project types: Ideal projects are interdisciplinary and address cutting-edge scientific and technical approaches generally not definable by means of narrowly focused hypotheses
1. Whether this project duplicates other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA or other federal agencies.
2. Program priorities and policy factors.
3. Applicants prior award performance
4. Partnerships and/or Participation of targeted groups.

E. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, OE will notify unsuccessful applicants and applicants whose proposal is being held for consideration next year in writing, by postal mail or email in December 2004. Successful applicants will receive notification that the application has been recommended for funding to the NOAA Grants Management Division. This notification is not an authorization to begin performance of the project. Official notification of funding, signed by a NOAA Grants Officer, is the authorizing document that allows the project to begin. Notifications will be issued through electronic mail to the Authorizing Official and the Principle Investigator of the project. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified that their proposal was not selected for recommendation. Unsuccessful applications will be kept on file in the Program Office for a period of at least 12 months, then destroyed.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants may be asked to modify objectives, work plans, or budgets prior to final approval of an award. The exact amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities, the collaboration duration, and specific NOAA cooperative involvement in the activities of each partnership will be determined in pre-award negotiations among the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office, and the NOAA OE staff. Project activities should not be initiated in the expectation of federal funding until a notice of award document is received from the NOAA Grants Office.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Department of Commerce Requirements. The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification of Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of October 1 2001 (66 FR 49917), as amended by the Federal Register notice published on October 30, 2002 (67 FR 66109) is applicable to this solicitation.

Limitation of Liability. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs if these programs are cancelled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal assistance opportunities including special fishing privileges. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA website: <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/> including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6_TOC.pdf and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc_ceq.htm

Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under their description of their activities, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems). In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting of an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required. Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying and implementing feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for the denial of an application.

C. Reporting

Progress reports are due semi-annually and cover 6-month periods that begin with the start date an applicant has selected. Progress reports are due directly to the NOAA Ocean Exploration office and are due no later than 30 days after each 6-month project period. A final report is due no later than 90 days after the expiration date of an award.

Progress reports should detail collaborative activities that have occurred during the reporting period that correspond with the goals and objectives identified in the narrative, as well as provide specific, project-related information.

VII. Agency Contact(s)

For further information contact the NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration at 301-713-9444 or submit inquiries via email to the Frequently Asked Questions address: oar.oe.FAQ@noaa.gov. Email inquiries should include the Principal Investigator's name in the subject heading. Inquiries can be mailed to ATTN: Proposal Manager, NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration, 1315 East West Highway, SSMC III, 10th Floor, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910